

Socioeconomic and Cultural Context of the Superior Coastal Plain

The socioeconomic and cultural context of a region must be considered in any planning process. While this plan focuses on the resource and recreation management of the properties, underlying socioeconomic and cultural contexts are important in understanding the needs of the public when planning the properties of the Superior Coastal Plain. Due to the method by which economic and cultural data is collected and made available, the context given here is for the counties intersected by the Superior Coastal Plain, rather than the landscape itself. The data for those counties, Douglas, Bayfield, and Ashland, is derived from two sources: the United States Census Bureau and "The Ecological Landscapes of Wisconsin." A very small portion of the landscape falls in Iron County, however, no DNR properties are present within this portion of the SCP, so Iron County is not part of this context section.

Socioeconomic Context

Population, Income, and Housing

As of 2016, the total population of SCP counties was 74,628 people at a density of approximately 20 people per square mile. This makes up 1.3% of the state's population and is lower than the average population density statewide; which is 105 persons per square mile. The two urban centers of the region are the City of Superior (2016 population of 26,676) in Douglas County and the City of Ashland (2016 population of 8,216) in Ashland County. In comparison to the rest of Wisconsin, the population of the Superior Coastal Plain counties is older, and has a lower percentage of persons 25-49.

Compared to the other ecological landscapes, the counties of the SCP have the lowest housing density at 11.9 units per square mile. Seasonal homes, however, are quite prevalent. These homes comprise 20.8% of the total housing stock in the SCP counties, compared to a 6.3% average statewide. This high percentage of seasonal homes has created the trend of housing growth growing independently of population. Per capita income is \$26,597 and median household income is \$47,141 per year in the Superior Coastal Plain counties.

Economic Sectors

Government, tourism, health care, and retail are the largest sectors of employment within the counties of the SCP. The transportation and warehousing sector plays a larger role in employment within the SCP counties than they do in the rest of the Wisconsin due to the influence of the Lake Superior ports. The tourism sector is quite prevalent in Bayfield County. Some agriculture occurs within this Superior Coastal Plain; including the growing of specialty crops such as cherries and apples.

Land Use and Ownership

Of the approximately 900,000 acres of land that make up the Superior Coastal Plain, 191,000 acres, or 21% of all land and water is owned by the public. Of this, 43,400 acres are federal lands, 88,200 acres are county owned, and 49,700 are owned by the State of Wisconsin. Of the timberland in the region, 71% is owned privately, 3% is owned federally, and 26% is owned by state and local governments. The reservations of the Bad River and Red Cliff bands of Lake Superior Ojibwa are within the SCP and contain lands of high conservation value. Non-governmental organization projects and industrial forest lands also play important conservation roles.



Cultural Context

Historically, several tribes temporarily settled in the region. Today, only the Chippewa remain on the Superior Coastal Plain. The Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa make their home on the northern shores of the Bayfield Peninsula. The Bad River Band owns and maintains a reservation along the Lower Bad River in Ashland County. A portion of the southern border of these lands forms the northern edge of Copper Falls State Park (WDNR, 2015). The department's properties in the Superior Coastal Plain are within the ceded territory of the Ojibwe Tribes. Native American tribes are independent, sovereign nations, as they were prior to the arrival of Europeans in North America. The Ojibwe Tribes ceded some lands in the northern one-third of Wisconsin to the United States Government in the Treaties of 1837 and 1842. In those treaties, they reserved their rights to hunt, trap, fish and gather within various publicly-owned lands. Treaty rights are currently being exercised and implemented.

Post-Euro-American settlement, the Superior Coastal Plain has played a large role in timber production and transportation of products to and from Wisconsin. Agriculture and mining have not historically played major roles in the Superior Coastal Plain. Today, the Superior Coastal Plain is largely rural, with only Douglas County being classified as metropolitan. The counties have economies that are classified as non-specialized by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (WDNR, 2015).

